



## FUTURE PROSPECTS FOR WILD TURKEYS IN WISCONSIN

**T**he DNR will continue to survey turkey populations and hunters to maintain a secure population and a high quality, safe hunt with biologically-based harvests. Turkey populations are thriving and have stabilized in most of southern and central Wisconsin. They have increased in northern Wisconsin and expanded into most of the suitable habitat. Northern turkeys are subject to more winter stress due to the harsher conditions. The birds prospered with little or no winter mortality in the mild to moderate winters of the late 1980s and early 1990s. However, severe winters in 1995-96 and 1996-97 took their tolls. Extended periods of ice-crusts or fluffy snow 10-12 inches deep in some parts of central and northern Wisconsin caused winter stress and losses.

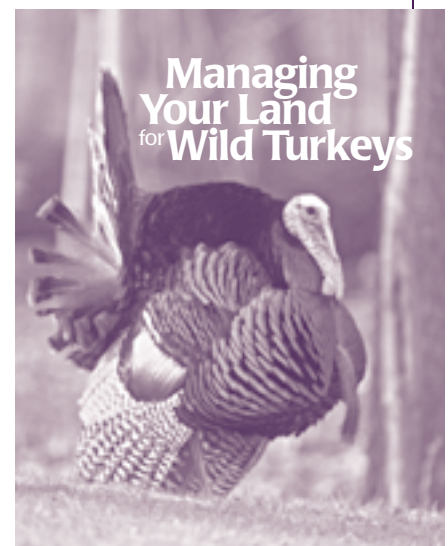
The future abundance of turkeys rests largely with rural landowners. They own about 95% of the land in southern Wisconsin, and 85% of the oak forests. Because oak forests are a key habitat component for turkeys and many other wildlife species, responsible management of this resource is critical. Natural succession of oak to other tree species is of particular concern. It is also threatened where cutting practices favor other species that compete for growing space including sugar maple, red maple, white birch, and white pine. The spread of gypsy moths into Wisconsin poses another threat to oaks. The DNR's Wild Turkey Management Plan identified declining suitability of turkey habitat as a result of lack of oak regeneration and succession as a significant problem. Rural homesite development may also reduce hunting opportunities and habitat quality.

Turkey hunters must purchase a wild turkey stamp. Stamp funds have been dedicated to wild turkey management since 1995, generating more than \$300,000 a year. About 75% of the funds raised have gone to maintain existing habitat and develop additional suitable turkey habitat on public and private lands. In 1998 alone over 2,000 acres were enhanced for turkey habitat. Projects included cutting or spraying other tree species to encourage oak regeneration; prescribed burning; mowing; and planting trees, shrubs, and native grasses. The Wisconsin Chapter of the NWTF has also raised about \$350,000 through August 1999 for habitat enhancement.

A DNR guide entitled "Managing Your Land for Wild Turkeys" is a useful reference for landowners and others interested in enhancing habitat quality for wild turkeys and other wildlife. It encourages landowners to look at their properties in context with their neighbors' and identify habitat components that may be limiting turkey abundance. The booklet describes timber harvest practices that favor oak woodlands: thinning, shelterwood cuts, clear cuts, and post-cut treatments. It also discusses using limited grazing or periodic mowing or burning to maintain small openings within woodlands. Cropland management techniques such as minimum and no-till practices, integrated pest management systems, and food plots can benefit turkeys too. The guide lists a variety of fruit and nut producing trees and shrubs that landowners can plant to provide a reliable food source for turkeys. Landowners can also obtain technical assistance, information



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**Effective habitat management should help ensure that future generations of hunters and others can enjoy the wild turkey resource.**



on cost-sharing programs, and plant materials from DNR wildlife managers and foresters, the National Wild Turkey Federation, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, and the University of Wisconsin-Extension.

Questions remain about possible long-term changes to the quantity and quality of turkey habitat in Wisconsin. However, through the cooperative efforts of private and public landowners, turkey enthusiasts, and wildlife professionals, effective habitat management should help ensure that future generations of hunters and others can enjoy the wild turkey resource.



PHOTOS: JOHN KUBISIAK



## SUGGESTED READING

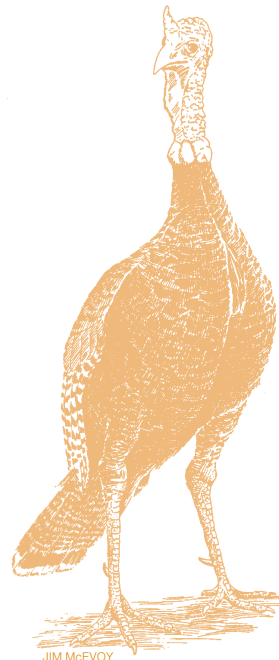
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